

Homily: 22nd Sunday: 2024: Cycle B: Dt. 4: 1-2, 6-8; Ps. 15; James 1: 17-18, 21-22, 27;
Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

“The Purification of One’s Heart”

Are our hearts focused on God? Or are they divided? It is a real battle, as St. Paul says (see Romans chap 7), that goes on in the heart of man, between the fallen nature we are born into and the redeemed nature that we receive in Baptism. **The lifelong spiritual challenge is to be daily transformed into Christ’s image, in all that we say, think, and do in our life.** God and the Church remind us the grace is there to improve daily and win the spiritual battle in the end, in Christ, if we daily cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

1. Today Jesus teaches us that *“Nothing that enters from outside can defile a person; but the things that come out from within are what defile. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”* Building on what Jesus says, the ***Catechism of the Catholic Church*** states, *“The heart is the seat of the moral personality of man”* (CCC 2517). In the Biblical understanding **the heart is the moral, spiritual and emotional center of the human person.** This is what we need to focus on if we want to draw closer to God. As human beings we often focus on what we see, but the real battle is behind or beneath the surface of things. **It is in the human heart where the real battleground between good and evil and between authenticity and hypocrisy is constantly being waged.** Jesus wants to be **the Lord of our heart**, but we must invite Him in or we will end up being, what St. Paul says in the 7th chapter of the letter to the Romans, a person who *“has the desire to do the right, but not the power. What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend.”* (Rom 7:18-19). To cite a few examples: you may want to be patient with a certain person, but then as soon as you interact with them you give in to impatience; you want to be sexually chaste with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but then you slip up. You want to say a daily Rosary and read the Bible in the evening for a half an hour, but end up flipping through the T.V. channels for a few hours, and then are too tired to pray. You go on vacation and have every intention of going to Sunday Mass, and then it doesn’t happen! **What is going**

on in this dynamic? Does this sound familiar? We can all relate to that sad reality.
It's not enough to know the good, we must choose it.

2. **We need purity of heart!** The sixth beatitude of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount is, “*Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God*” (Mt 5:8). What does that mean? Well, the Catechism tells us, “*Purity in heart refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God’s holiness, chiefly in **three** areas: **charity** (cf. 1 Tim 4:3-9; 2 Tim 2:22), **chastity or sexual rectitude** (cf. 1 Thess 4:7; Col 3:5; Eph 4:19), and **love of truth and orthodoxy of faith** (cf. Titus 1:15; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2: 23-26).* **There is a deep connection between purity of heart, of body and of faith.** To paraphrase St. Augustine, the playboy in his youth to Saint later in life, who put it so well: *if we want to faithful, we must believe the articles of the Creed, so that by believing we may obey God, by obeying we may live well, by living well we may purify our hearts, and with pure hearts we may understand what we believe (in CCC paragraph 2518).* Or as St. James puts it bluntly today in the 2nd reading, “***Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourself. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.***” **All of us are called by the Lord to live the Faith well in adhering to correct orthodox Catholic teaching and manifesting the Faith in active works of charity** - even when no one is looking, or giving you credit and human respect. We’re never to live our Faith for “show”.

3. **How do we gain the power to live our lives with pure hearts in relation to God and neighbor?** **We must ask God daily for this grace. Also remember it is our inner life which is what sets us apart from the animals.** That’s why as Catholics we don’t just confess external sins, but also the sinful thoughts in our minds and hearts. *We must **daily pray and offer acts of penance** for the gift for chastity of mind and body, for purity of intention, and for a true love of God and neighbor.* **The battle to purify our hearts is difficult but necessary - if we want to get to Heaven someday.** May the Lord give us the grace and assistance by the Holy Spirit daily **to purify our hearts** in His holy love and truth here on earth, as well as through the regular reception of the Sacrament of Confession, so as not to have to do it in **Purgatory**. God bless you.